Chinese University EFL Teachers' Knowledge of and Stance on Plagiarism

Conocimientos y actitudes ante el plagio del profesorado de lengua inglesa en universidades chinas

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism has engendered increasing concern in academia in the past few decades. While previous studies have investigated student plagiarism from various perspectives, how plagiarism is understood and responded to by university teachers, especially those in English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) writing contexts, has been under-researched. As academic insiders and educators of future academics, university teachers play a key role in educating students against plagiarism and upholding academic integrity. Their knowledge of and attitudes toward plagiarism not only have a crucial influence on their students' perceptions of plagiarism but can also provide insights into how institutions of higher education are tackling the problem. The study reported in this paper aims to address this imbalance in research on plagiarism by focusing on a sample of 108 teachers from 38 Chinese universities. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data that comprise textual judgments and writing samples, it examines whether EFL teachers in Chinese universities share Anglo-American conceptions of plagiarism, what stance they take on detected cases of plagiarism, and what factors may have influenced their perceptions. Findings from this study problematize the popular, yet over-simplistic, view that Chinese EFL writers are tolerant of plagiarism and point to academic and teaching experience as influences on their perceptions and attitudes concerning plagiarism.

RESUMEN

El plagio ha generado preocupaciones crecientes en el círculo académico en las últimas décadas. Aunque estudios anteriores han investigado el plagio del estudiante desde varias perspectivas, todavía hay poca investigación sobre cómo los profesores universitarios entienden el plagio y responden ante él, especialmente en contextos escritos en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). Como expertos académicos y educadores de futuros académicos, los profesores universitarios desempeñan un papel clave en la formación de los estudiantes contra el plagio y en la defensa de la integridad académica. Sus conocimientos y actitudes con respecto al plagio no solo tienen una influencia crucial sobre las percepciones estudiantiles hacia el plagio, sino que también pueden proporcionar ideas sobre cómo las universidades resuelven el problema. El presente estudio pretende abordar este desequilibrio en la investigación sobre el plagio, centrándose en una muestra de 108 profesores de 38 universidades chinas. Basándose en datos cuantitativos y cualitativos obtenidos de juicios textuales y de redacciones, se examina: 1) si los docentes de EFL en universidades chinas comparten los conceptos angloamericanos del plagio; 2) qué postura tienen en los casos de plagio detectados; 3) qué factores pueden influir en sus comprensiones. Los resultados de este estudio problematizan la opinión popular y simplista de que los escritores chinos de inglés como lengua extranjera son indulgentes en cuanto al plagio, y señalan que las experiencias académicas y educativas tienen mucha influencia sobre sus percepciones y actitudes hacia el plagio.

KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

Plagiarism, second language, Chinese universities, English language teachers, academic integrity, attitude, knowledge, academic socialization.
Plagio, segunda lengua, universidades chinas, docentes de inglés, integridad académica, actitud, conocimiento, socialización académica.

1. Introduction

Academic writing builds on the current knowledge base by incorporating words and ideas from existing work into new texts (Pecorari & Petric, 2014). This is a convention-governed process (Pecorari, 2008) in which a writer has to comply with established and shared disciplinary practices to steer clear of plagiarism accusations. In the past few decades, the advent of the Internet and the boom of various information and communication technologies have made an ever increasing wealth of sources readily available and easy to plagiarize (Hu & Lei, 2012). The incidence of plagiarism has been on the increase and engendered growing concern in academia.

To tackle the problem of plagiarism, it is necessary to look beyond the symptoms to the underlying causes (Macdonald & Carroll, 2006). In essence, all contributing factors to plagiarism boil down to a certain deficiency in the perpetrators, who may lack academic integrity, the willingness, the necessary knowledge or the language skills to use sources appropriately (Pecorari, 2008). For second language (L2) writers who have to navigate the writing conventions associated with a new language, the contributing factors can be more complex. The most widely discussed factor is culture-specific views of plagiarism. It is frequently suggested that cultures differ in their understanding and acceptance of plagiarism (Bloch & Chi, 1995; Pennycook, 1996; Sapp, 2002; Scollon, 1995; Shei, 2005; Sowden, 2005). For example, literacy practices such as memorization and imitation of model texts that are common in Confucian-heritage cultures are often cited to explain why Chinese students in particular and Asian students in general tend to hold different conceptions of plagiarism (Bloch & Chi, 1995; Maxwell, Curtis, & Vardanega, 2008). Other researchers (Liu, 2005; Pecorari, 2008; Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2005), however, maintain that difficulties faced by L2 writers are more likely a result of their inadequate language proficiency, which may cause them to feel unconfident about their own language use and hence overrely on source texts. Empirical studies on factors likely to influence understandings of and attitudes toward plagiarism have yielded contradictory findings, especially in terms of how enculturation in higher education may impact on knowledge of and stance on plagiarism (Chandrasegaran, 2000; Deckert, 1993; Lei & Hu, 2014; Sapp, 2002; Wheeler, 2009).

In Anglo-American academia, source documentation and attributed paraphrasing are considered two important strategies for avoiding plagiarism (Park, 2003)[1]. While the former is reasonably straightfor-

ward and can be done with adequate training, the latter entails high demands on subject knowledge and linguistic competence (Keck, 2010) and, as such, usually forms «a complex and often elusive experience for L2 writers» (Hirvela & Du, 2013: 87). Moreover, researchers and academic gatekeepers differ greatly in terms of their standards for sufficient paraphrasing. While some believe that to keep clear of plagiarism, there should be no traces in a paraphrase of verbatim copying of strings of even a few words from the original (Benos, Fabres, & Farmer, 2005; Roig, 2001; Shi, 2004), others adopt more lax standards by allowing the inclusion of more source text in a paraphrase (Keck, 2006; Pecorari, 2008). Empirical studies which examine paraphrasing practices in actual writing samples would provide a better understanding of what paraphrasing practices are considered acceptable by participants.

Considering the essential role that teachers can play in detecting and responding to student plagiarism and educating students against plagiarism, researchers have been directing increasing attention to teacher perceptions of plagiarism. Previous studies found that teachers differed among themselves as to what constitutes plagiarism (Borg, 2009; Flint, Clegg, & Macdonald, 2006; Pickard, 2006) and that many had little knowledge of institutional definitions of plagiarism and did not teach students about plagiarism effectively (Eriksson & Sullivan, 2008). In two of the very few such studies conducted in the Chinese context, Lei and Hu (2014; 2015) found that while most of the EFL teachers in their study could identify both unacknowledged copying and unattributed paraphrasing as plagiarism and/or held condemnatory attitudes toward detected plagiarism, their understandings of unattributed paraphrasing, which is considered a less clear-cut form of plagiarism than unacknowledged copying, appeared divergent and ambivalent. Apart from this, it remains largely unknown to what extent Chinese teachers' perceptions of plagiarism are different from or similar to those widely accepted in Anglo-American academia. This lack of research on Chinese teachers' understandings of plagiarism is surprising given the many studies done on Chinese learners in Anglophone and Chinese universities (Bloch & Chi, 1995; Deckert, 1993; Matalene, 1985; Pennycook, 1996; Sapp, 2002; Shi, 2004; Valentine, 2006).

To fill the gap in plagiarism research on Chinese teachers, we conducted a study on a sample of Chinese EFL teachers from multiple universities in mainland China to examine whether they shared Anglo-American standards abut plagiarism and what factors

may have influenced their knowledge of and stance on plagiarism. We aimed to gather empirical evidence that could

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants (N=108)										
Gender		Highest degree			Academic rank				Overseas experience	
Male	Female	BA	MA	PhD	AL	L	AP	FP	Yes	No
27	81	5	90	13	12	78	15	3	50	58
25%	75%	5%	83%	12%	11%	72%	14%	3%	46%	54%

Note. AL=Assistant lecturer; L=Lecturer; AP=Associate professor; FP=Full professor.

deepen our understanding of plagiarism as an important discursive phenomenon and put cultural explanations of plagiarism to the test (Flowerdew & Li, 2007). Specifically, the following research questions were formulated to guide this study: How well do Chinese university English teachers understand plagiarism? What are their attitudes toward recognized plagiarism? What factors may influence their knowledge of and attitudes toward plagiarism?

2. Methodology
2.1. Participants

We adopted a combination of convenience and snowball sampling strategies for participant recruitment. We contacted our personal acquaintances who were English teachers in different Chinese universities, invited them to participate in the study, and asked for their assistance in recruiting colleagues who might be interested in participating in our study. Ultimately, 108 EFL teachers from 38 universities located in different regions of mainland China were involved. Table 1 summarizes the relevant demographic information on these participants. The sample ranged in age from 25 to 50 (M=34.33, SD=4.99) and comprised predominantly female teachers, reflecting the typical gender distributions of the female-dominated discipline in Chinese universities. It included both very experienced teachers and those new to the profession. The 107 participants who provided information about their length of teaching service had an average of 9.47 years of teaching experience (SD=5.39; range=1 to 27). A great majority of the participants held a Master's degree and were hired at the academic rank of lecturer. Slightly less than half of the participants had overseas academic experience, that is, studying in universities in Anglophone countries or in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) contexts such as Hong Kong and Singapore, where the Anglo-American notions of plagiarism are widely adopted.

2.2. Instruments

We used two instruments to collect data: the Plagiarism Knowledge Survey (PKS), and the Paraphrasing Practices Survey (PPS). Both instruments were adapted from Roig (2001). The PKS aimed to explore whether the participants would recognize insufficient paraphrasing as plagiarism, to ascertain the criteria they adopted for determination, and to investigate their attitudes (e.g., punitive or lenient) toward recognized cases of plagiarism. It consisted of an original two-sentence paragraph and six rewritten versions of this paragraph. The first four versions were incrementally but insufficiently paraphrased from the original and thus were instances of plagiarism, whereas the last two versions were adequately paraphrased and free of plagiarism. As reported by Roig (1997), four American professors independently validated the instrument and agreed with the plagiarism characterization of the six written versions. The participants in our study were asked to compare each rewritten version with the original paragraph, choose one of the three provided options «plagiarized, not plagiarized, or cannot determine, and then provide reasons for their judgment. In order to elicit participants' attitudes toward identified plagiarism, we added a rating scale of 0 to 10 points to the original PKS and asked them to rate each rewritten version according to the presence and gravity of plagiarism: the gravest case of plagiarism could be penalized by a zero, and a properly paraphrased paragraph might be awarded the highest score possible.

The PPS described a scenario in which participants had to paraphrase the following short paragraph from a journal article about astrology (Roig, 2001): «If you have ever had your astrological chart done, you may have been impressed with its seeming accuracy. Careful reading shows many such charts to be made up of mostly flattering traits. Naturally, when your personality is described in desirable terms, it is hard to deny that the description has the «ring of truth» (Coon, 1995: 29).

The instrument generated authentic writing samples by asking the participants to paraphrase the paragraph in a way that they believed would not constitute plagiarism. The participants were also required to fill out a personal information sheet which asked about their gender, age, educational background, teaching experience, number of academic publications, as well as the types of students and courses that they usually taught. Information on such variables was gathered because previous studies (Hu & Lei, 2012; Lei & Hu,

2014, 2015) suggested that they could have an impact on the participants' knowledge of and stance on plagiarism as well as their paraphrasing practices.

2.3. Data coding and analysis

The PKS generated two sets of scores: the plagiarism knowledge scores (hereafter knowledge scores), and the plagiarism stance scores (hereafter stance scores). Knowledge scores were calculated following Roig (2001). For each participant, one point was given for each rewritten version that was correctly identified, two points for each rewritten version that was not identified (including both choices of «cannot determine» and cases where a participant failed to give any judgment), and three points for each version incorrectly identified. A participant who correctly identified all six rewritten versions would obtain a perfect score of 6, whereas one who misjudged all six cases would get 18 points. Thus, lower scores would indicate greater knowledge of plagiarism and paraphrasing. Stance scores were derived by calculating the mean of the ratings given by each participant to the rewritten paragraphs that s/he identified as plagiarized (regardless of whether the paragraph was designed as a case of plagiarism or proper paraphrasing). The higher a stance score, the more lenient the participant was toward recognized plagiarism. The knowledge and stance scores thus obtained were analyzed with SPSS (version 23.0) to obtain descriptive and inferential statistics needed for answering our research questions.

The PKS also generated qualitative data in the form of the participants' written justifications for their judgments and ratings of the rewritten versions. The second author read these justifications repeatedly and analyzed them iteratively to identify the factors that the participants took into consideration when judging and rating the rewritten paragraphs. A coding scheme based on this analysis was then developed and used to capture the criteria the participants adopted to evaluate the rewritten versions. To ensure the reliability of the coding, a graduate student used the coding scheme to code a randomly selected subset of the data independently, and the inter-coder agreement was 100%.

The coding of the PPS data was conducted by the second author and consisted in identifying strings of three or more consecutive

words in the paraphrases that were appropriated from the original paragraph. Because the coding did not involve subjective judgments, a second coder was not involved.

3. Findings
3.1. Results from the PKS

The participants' knowledge scores were analyzed both descriptively and inferentially. The range, mean, and mode of the knowledge scores were calculated to gauge the extent to which the Chinese teachers as a group accurately identified cases of plagiarism. The mean knowledge score was 7.51 (SD= 1.488; range=6-12), indicating that the 108 participants were able to correctly identify most of the rewritten paragraphs. Notably, as many as 43 teachers (approximately 40%) had the perfect score of 6, attesting to a satisfactory knowledge of plagiarism and proper paraphrasing. To show how accurately the participants identified each rewritten version, the percentage of responses to each response category (i.e., «plagiarized, not plagiarized, cannot determine») for each rewritten version was calculated, and the results are summarized in table 2. Notably, none of the rewritten versions was judged with perfect consensus. For the first four rewritten versions, as the extent of reformulation increased, the percentages of correct identifications dropped, whereas the percentages of misidentifications and choices of the «cannot determine» category increased correspondingly. This pattern clearly indicated that difficulty in identifying plagiarism increased with the extent of change made to the original text; it also suggested the existence of different criteria for plagiarism and proper paraphrasing even among teachers from the same discipline.

Of the 108 participants, 102 provided written justifications for their judgments regarding the rewritten versions. An analysis of these justifications revealed that they used three criteria when evaluating the paragraphs. First, many participants based their judgments on the extent to which the original paragraph was changed. About 65% of the participants pointed out that to avoid accusations of plagiarism, one needs to rewrite the original to change its diction and/or structure, as illustrated by the following representative justifications:

• The rewritten paragraph is

Table 2. Responses to the PKS by Type of Judgment and Rewritten Paragraph (N=108)						
Paragraph	Plagiarized		Not plagiarized		Cannot determine	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	103	95	4	4	1	1
2	103	95	3	3	2	2
3	96	89	5	5	7	6
4	64	59	24	22	20	19
5[a]	6	5	95	88	7	7
6[a]	13	12	85	79	10	9

Note. [a]Rewritten versions that were not plagiarized.

thoroughly paraphrased, i.e., the student uses all his own words as well as restructures the sentences to express the idea of the original paragraph (Rewritten version 5).

• [This is plagiarism] because the same or similar sentence structures are applied (Rewritten version 2).

• Changing the order of the original sentences without paraphrasing is definitely plagiarism (Rewritten version 1).

A second criterion used by the participants concerned the correct format of citation. Although the PKS instructions asked the participants to assume the inclusion of a proper citation for each rewritten version, many participants still emphasized the importance of acknowledging the source in the correct format, as can be seen in the following quotations:

• This version suggests clearly that it is the research result of another researcher. But it does not say whose idea it is and where it comes from (Rewritten version 4).

• The author points out the source of the finding and paraphrases it in his own words. It will be better if the researcher's name is clearly mentioned (Rewritten version 5).

• In academic writing, it stipulates that you need to state overtly whose ideas you are discussing (Rewritten version 5).

Still another consideration the participants had was whether certain words or expressions were used to indicate that the writer was reporting another person's ideas, as the following quotations illustrate:

• This is not P, since the writer uses many words to indicate that this is quoted from another researcher (Rewritten version 5).

• The writer used «according to one researcher» to indicate that he is retelling someone's research results (Rewritten version 4).

A 3-way ANOVA was run to assess the potential impact of teaching experience, overseas academic experience, and educational attainment on the knowledge scores. The participants were divided into three groups according to their years of teaching (1-7, 8-14, 15+) and two groups according to their highest degrees (BA/MA, PhD). The one case with missing value on teaching experience was deleted, leaving 107 cases for the analysis.

The analysis found that the knowledge scores were not influenced by teaching experience, $F(3, 107)=.089$, $p=.966$, $\eta_p^2=.003$, overseas academic experience, $F(1, 107)=.564$, $p=.454$, $\eta_p^2=.006$, or educational attainment, $F(1, 107)=.147$, $p=.702$, $\eta_p^2=.002$. There was no significant interaction bet-

ween teaching experience and educational attainment, $F(2, 107)=.450$, $p=.639$, $\eta_p^2=.009$, between teaching experience and overseas academic experience, $F(2, 107)=.882$, $p=.417$, $\eta_p^2=.018$, between educational attainment and overseas academic experience, $F(1, 107)=.018$, $p=.892$, $\eta_p^2=.000$, or among the three variables, $F(1, 107)=.731$, $p=.398$, $\eta_p^2=.008$. The effect sizes indicated that none of the independent variables or the interactions reached the criterial value suggested by Cohen (1988) for a small effect (i.e., $\eta_p^2=.02$).

The range, mean, and mode of the stance scores were obtained as measures of how the teachers as a group reacted to identified instances of plagiarism. The 108 respondents had a mean stance score of 1.73 (range=0-5.17), which indicated their overall punitive attitudes toward what they perceived to be plagiarism. Approximately 14% of the participants believed that no score should be awarded to a plagiarized text, and another 67.6% gave an average rating of less than 2 points. These results were consistent with an understanding of plagiarism as an act of stealing, as revealed in the following quotations:

• The first sentence is stolen from the original (Rewritten version 6).

• This one has made it clear enough this is a research finding of others but this cannot justify the act of «stealing» most [of] the sentences from the original paragraph (Rewritten version 4).

• The rewriter paraphrased the original statement through intentionally reversing the order of the sentences, without giving any credit to the author through citation. It is the steal of both language and ideas (Rewritten version 1).

A 3-way ANOVA was run to determine possible influences on the stance scores, with the three independent variables being teaching experience, overseas academic experience, and plagiarism knowledge. The participants were divided into three groups according to their knowledge scores (6 points, 7-9 points, and 10+). The ANOVA found that the stance scores were influenced by teaching experience, $F(3, 107)=3.306$, $p=.024$, $\eta_p^2=.099$, but were not affected by overseas academic experience, $F(1, 107)=3.245$, $p=.075$, $\eta_p^2=.035$, or plagiarism knowledge, $F(2, 107)=.343$, $p=.710$, $\eta_p^2=.008$. The direction of the relation between teaching experience and the stance scores indicated that as teaching experience increased, the stance scores increased accordingly. In other words, the longer time a participant spent on tertiary teaching, the more lenient s/he would become toward plagiarism.

3.2. Results from the PPS

The PPS elicited paraphrases of the original paragraph from 96 of the 108 participants. Fifty-seven (59.38%) of them did not appropriate any strings of 3 or more words from the original. Thirty-nine (40.62%) produced paraphrases containing 3 or more consecutive words copied verbatim from the original. Table 3 presents the percentages of participants who copied word strings of different lengths. Most verbatim copying involved strings of 3 or 4 words, but 3 paraphrases appropriated unusually long word strings.

To find out what factors might influence the participants' textual appropriation practices, the 96 teachers who completed the PPS were divided into two groups: those who did not appropriate any string of three or more words and those who did. Five 2-way Chi square tests were run to determine if there was any significant association between engagement in verbatim copying and teaching experience, educational attainment, overseas academic experience, plagiarism knowledge, and plagiarism stance, respectively. Participant groupings according to the four variables other than plagiarism stance followed the procedures described earlier. The grouping for plagiarism stance was done by putting those who gave average scores from 0 to 2 points, from above 2 to 4 points, and above 4 points into three separate groups. Four of the Chi square tests found no significant relationship: between teaching experience and textual appropriation practice, X^2 (2, N= 96)= .732, p=.694; between educational attainment and textual appropriation practice, X^2 (1, N= 96)=.029, p=.864; between plagiarism knowledge and textual appropriation practice, X^2 (2, N=96)= 2.389, p= .303; and between plagiarism stance and textual appropriation practice, X^2 (2, N=96)= 2.168, p= .338. A significant association was found between overseas academic experience and textual appropriation practice, X^2 (1, N=96)=5.597, p= .018. These results indicated that those teachers who had studied in overseas universities were less likely to incorporate word strings from the original text.

4. Discussion and conclusions

4.1. Chinese university English teachers' knowledge of plagiarism

Both the quantitative and qualitative results suggested that as a whole, the Chinese university EFL teachers in this study tended to understand plagiarism in a manner similar to that prevalent in Anglo-American academia. The knowledge scores yielded by the PKS

showed that the participants as a group were able to correctly distinguish the plagiarized texts from correctly paraphrased ones. As demonstrated by the justifications given for their textual judgments, they considered plagiarism not only according to the extent to which the original text was changed, but also in terms of textual ownership and source attribution – perceptions closely associated with Anglo-American conceptions of plagiarism (Marshall & Garry, 2006; Pennycook, 1996; Scollon, 1995; Shi, 2004). The writing samples collected with the PPS further indicated that the great majority of the Chinese teachers paraphrased the given paragraph quite sufficiently, perhaps even more thoroughly than the American psychology professors in Roig (2001). With the exception of a few cases, the teachers had both the awareness and ability to sufficiently modify the original paragraph to avoid plagiarism.

Taken together, our results contradict the findings of some previous studies that Chinese culture is more accepting of plagiarism and that Chinese writers do

Table 3. Verbatim Copying of Word Strings					
	String length (words)				
	3	4	5	6	7+
No. of participants	24	11	5	4	5
Percentage	25%	12%	5%	4%	5%

not acknowledge sources explicitly (Bloch & Chi, 1995; Sapp, 2002; Shei, 2005). A plausible explanation of the contradictory findings lies in Flowerdew and Li's (2007) observations that understandings of plagiarism in non-Anglo-American contexts are increasingly influenced by those in Anglo-American academia and that although the concept of plagiarism does not have a historical and ideological origin in China, perceptions of plagiarism should not be seen as culturally conditioned but constantly evolving as circumstances change (Lei & Hu, 2014). The growing penetration of Anglo-American ideas of plagiarism seems inevitable as long as English remains the academic lingua franca and Anglo-American dominance of the international academic community continues. Thus, the Chinese academic community is increasingly compelled to adapt its values and textual practices to face and navigate the Anglo-American dominance in order to participate in knowledge production in English-medium international journals.

4.2. Chinese university English teachers' attitudes toward plagiarism

As reported in a previous section, the PKS data yielded a mean stance score of 1.73 on a scale of 0-10

points for recognized plagiarism, indicating clearly punitive attitudes held by the teachers toward what they perceived to be transgressive intertextuality. A sizeable number of teachers (n=15) took a zero tolerance approach by awarding no points to any paragraph they regarded as plagiarized. Such a harsh stance was not surprising in view of the teachers' conception of plagiarism as a moral transgression, that is, an act of «stealing». It also showed that these teachers found plagiarism punishable and punished the perpetrators by marking them down. These results corroborate several recent studies (Hu & Lei, 2012; Lei & Hu, 2014, 2015) which reported a generally punitive attitude held by Chinese teachers and students toward perceived plagiarism, but contradict the conclusion of a number of earlier studies (Bloch & Chi, 1995; Deckert, 1993; Matalene, 1985; Pennycook, 1996; Sapp, 2002) which found Chinese students tolerant of and likely to engage in plagiaristic behaviors.

There are several plausible explanations of the contradictory findings. First, because the second group of studies mentioned above focused on Chinese students, it was possible that our teacher participants had a stronger sense of academic integrity and hence a greater obligation for ethical behaviors. Second, the EFL teachers in our study were likely to be much more knowledgeable about plagiarism as a result of their professional work than the students involved in the previous studies and, consequently, were able to recognize most instances of plagiarism. Third, it would be also reasonable to expect the university EFL teachers in our study to have stronger linguistic competence in English, when compared with the students in the previous studies, and therefore be able to use a greater variety of strategies for avoiding plagiarism (e.g., summarizing or paraphrasing a source thoroughly with appropriate attribution). In any case, our findings constitute new counterevidence against over-simplistic claims about Chinese writers being culturally more accepting of plagiarism (Sapp, 2002; Sowden, 2005).

4.3. Factors influencing Chinese university English teachers' knowledge of and attitudes toward plagiarism

Unexpectedly, teaching experience was found to have a negative effect on teacher stance on plagiarism in this study. In other words, the longer a teacher worked at university, the more lenient s/he was toward plagiarism. Two explanations are possible. It was likely for some teachers to relax their moral stance on plagiarism over years of teaching service, perhaps, as a result of having seen too many cases of student plagia-

rism, having been frustrated by going through all the trouble of navigating red tape when dealing with student plagiarism, or having been resigned to the futility of individual efforts to stem student plagiarism. Another possibility is that teachers with longer years of teaching service were older, had had less exposure to Anglo-American conceptions of plagiarism when they were in graduate and teacher education programs and, as a result, understood plagiarism differently from their younger counterparts. Given the nature of our data, it was impossible to tell which explanation was valid. If the first explanation was closer to the reality, our finding revealed a truly disconcerting tendency. If the second explanation captured the truth, our finding pointed to a need to re-educate the educators regularly so as to update their understandings of plagiarism, strengthen their condemnatory attitudes toward plagiarism, and ensure consistent treatment of student plagiarism (Pecorari & Shaw, 2012).

Overseas academic experience was also found to be an influence on the teachers' textual appropriation practice. That is, those teachers with overseas academic experience were less likely to copy strings of words verbatim from the original text in their paraphrases. This result was consistent with the findings of several studies (Deckert, 1993; Gu & Brooks, 2008; Song-Turner, 2008) which found a notable enculturational effect on the understandings of Anglo-American notions of plagiarism developed by Asian/Chinese students studying in ESL contexts, particularly those being immersed in Anglo-American settings. In our study, more than half of the teachers with overseas academic experience studied in a 1-year postgraduate program in Singapore. The program briefed new students about academic integrity at the program orientation, required them to sign the university's code of academic conduct, included a range of extended written assignments which must be submitted through Turnitin for plagiarism checking, and had a course focused specifically on norms and conventions of English academic writing. Lecturers in the program emphasized the importance of avoiding plagiarism and taught the students how to reference and appropriate sources in academic writing. With such extensive socialization against plagiarism, it was not surprising that the overseas-trained teachers were more capable of paraphrasing the original paragraph in a plagiarism-free manner.

4.4. Limitations and recommendations

Given the huge population of EFL teachers in China and the nature of plagiarism as «a complex pro-

blem about student learning, compounded by a lack of clarity about the concept of plagiarism, and a lack of clear policy and pedagogy surrounding the issue» (Angelil-Carter, 2000: 2), this study only gives a glimpse into the issues discussed, and its findings are by no means conclusive. Further research is needed to develop a more robust and contextualized understanding of how plagiarism is understood and dealt with in Chinese higher education. To facilitate this research, we offer several recommendations regarding sampling and data collection.

Future research can adopt more systematic sampling strategies to recruit participants who work in universities of different types and prestige, and teach different types of students (e.g., English-language majors vs. non-majors; undergraduates vs. postgraduates) and courses (writing vs. non-writing). More detailed inclusion criteria would not only contribute to the representativeness of the sample but also facilitate comparisons between participants with different backgrounds. Future studies can also sample teachers from a range of disciplines so that disciplinary differences in relation to perceptions and practices of plagiarism can be investigated. In addition, not only teachers but also students and institutional administrators can be involved in the same investigation to explore plagiarism from different viewpoints and develop a multi-faceted picture.

As for data collection, it would be worthwhile to explore if adjustments to our instruments and their administration may have any influence on participants' responses. For one thing, the instructions in the two instruments, especially the PKS, added several lines and might have caused extra burdens to some participants in an already demanding task. These instructions could be simplified or translated into Chinese so as to ensure better comprehensibility. For another, the PKS was placed before the PPS in the package of questionnaires sent out for the present study, and most participants presumably followed this order while completing the questionnaires. Undertaking the PKS (i.e., reading and judging the legitimacy of several rewritten versions of the same original paragraph) first might have alerted some participants to the importance of thoroughly paraphrasing an original text and caused them to make extra efforts in the subsequent PPS to keep clear of unacceptable paraphrasing practices. Future studies can explore whether reversing the order of the PKS and the PPS will generate writing samples exhibiting different textual appropriation practices. Large-scale investigations into institutional regulations on plagiarism, like those reported in Sutherland-

Smith (2011) and Yamada (2003), can also be conducted to collect comprehensive and in-depth data on how Chinese universities are tackling the challenges posed by plagiarism.

Notes

[1] For example, a quotation is expected in Anglo-American writing conventions to be attributed to the original author regardless of how familiar the quotation or the author is to the intended readership. However, such attribution is considered unnecessary and even condescending to a knowledgeable readership by many a Chinese writer (Bloch & Chi, 1995).

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